

Chairman's Report, GM on 19 April 2023 by Chris Boyd.

Welcome

I, Christopher Boyd, on behalf of the Executive Committee of The Bathurst Residents and Ratepayers Association welcome all members to this AGM, we hope that it is informative and engenders some excitement for the years ahead. In the past, it would seem, the Association has had a history noted by its inability to gain traction. There have been examples of extreme unpleasantness, even death threats and assault, none of this was I aware of when I accepted the position Chairman! It seems that to some extent that spirit lives on and I can only say that on the few occasions this was experience has led to our resolve to not shrink from what is good and proper.

I hope and trust that the subsequent Chairperson and his/her committee are able to build on the limited successes we have achieved in this the first BR&RA for almost 20 years!

Thanks

The following members additional to the committee were nominated and elected into office unopposed at the inaugural meeting:

- Community Safety Chris Jonsson
- Commonage Patrick Grafton

The following positions remained vacant despite appeals having been made to the residents of Bathurst and this was a significant setback

- Infrastructure & Services
- Community Look & Feel
- Community Heritage
- Marketing and Communication

The following members were co-opted onto the BR&RA:

Gavin Came, Tracey Lloyd and Stephen Forder because of their particular skills and talents.

A specialist crime investigator was also co-opted for some time, this was required because without him being a member of the BR&RA he had no locus standi (legal standing) to make enquiries on our behalf.

Carey Tesselaar resigned quite early in the term. Patrick Grafton tendered his resignation recently.

Thank you to Committee

I would like to express my sincere appreciation to my committee for the support they have provided, each has given their time and energy freely. Whilst not detracting from anyone I do want to acknowledge Stan Esterhuizen, my deputy chair who has worked alongside me, offering support and guidance all the way!

Patrick has of course done an enormous amount for the community. Some will say that his efforts are misguided in that we already pay Eskom for the service but if we had not contributed and if Patrick hadn't gone the extra mile we would be really stuck! It was encouraging to see how many villages rallied together to support this initiative contributing towards the cost of the project. It was less obvious that our village was prepared to help with the clean-up.

Thank you both, I appreciate your efforts immensely and I would guess that the village will agree with me.

Our Beginning

After the establishment of the BR&RA and in alignment with the BR&RA Constitution the Committee met on several occasions and developed a guiding strategy with key deliverables, these were intended to primarily influence service delivery through the various organs of state and their agencies and to be an interest and pressure group. These deliverables were presented at a community meeting held at Pikes Post. The committee then set to work with the intention of meeting them. These objectives were meaningful but way too adventurous for a village ratepayers association, staffed by mostly retired individuals or people trying to make a living in very difficult times.

During the process of defining and grappling with the challenges we decided that our work fell into seven main categories and we believed that if we addressed the sub categories (A to K) as the described below, then we would make a significant inroads.

Strategic Objectives

1. SOCIAL DEVELOPMENTS - OWNERS - CLAIRE, STANLEY & CAREY.
 - A. IDENTIFY NGO'S
 - B. STOKVEL
 - C. TENNIS COURT
 - D. SOCIAL COHESION
 - E. STRUCTURE PLAY & CRAFT
 - F. SCHOOL PROGRAMS
 - G. UNEMPLOYMENT
 - H. LIBRARY USE
 - I. COMMUNITY CENTRE
 - J. CHILD WELFARE
 - K. USE OF LOCAL FACILITIES
2. MARKETING - OWNER CAREY
 - A. PUBLIC EXPOSURE
 - B. IMPROVE ACCESS TO BRRA
 - C. INFORM RESIDENTS & RATEPAYERS
 - D. BRRA EVENTS
 - E. COMMUNICATIONS RE MUNICIPALITY ACTIVITIES
 - F. BRRA REGISTRATION
 - G. IMPROVED BRRA PRESENCE
3. TOURISM - OWNER - CAREY
 - A. NATIONAL MONUMENTS
 - B. COORDINATED MARKETING OF BATHURST
 - C. TOURISM (GENERAL)

3. ROADWORKS - OWNER - WARRICK
 - A. POTHOLES
 - B. POOR ROADS
 - C. ROAD QUALITY
 - E. PEDESTRIAN PATHS
 - F. ROAD SIGNAGE
 - G. ROAD SURFACES
4. COMMUNITY SAFETY - OWNER - CHRIS JONSSON.
 - A. VANDALISM
 - B. CAR GUARD SOLUTION
 - C. VIGILANCE AND REPORTING
 - D. LIAISE WITH SAPS
 - E. SNAKE REHABILITATION
 - F. CAMERAS FOR SECURITY
 - G. STRAY ANIMALS
 - H. FIRE FIGHTING
 - I. STREET COMMITTEE
 - J. NEIGHBOURHOOD WATCH
 - K. HOUSE BREAK-INS
5. NATURAL ENVIRONMENT - OWNER - PATRICK
 - A. OVERGROWTH
 - B. INVADER PLANTS
 - C. MANAGE DUMPING ON ROADS
 - D. MANAGE DUMP
 - E. STRAY CATTLE
 - F. MANAGE CATTLE ON COMMONAGE
 - G. OVERGROWN VERGES
 - H. RECYCLING CENTRE
 - I. LITTER
 - J. ROADSIDE DUMPING
6. WATER PROVISION - OWNER - CHRIS BOYD
 - A. SECURITY
 - B. WATER SUPPLY
 - C. WATER SHORTAGE
 - D. WATER RETICULATION

Library Use

There is ample evidence that the Library in Bathurst, whilst used quite regularly meets only a limited need within our community. The modern need of municipal libraries includes the very real need of access to information services. The Libraries book collection also needs revision. The above all cost money and as yet a funder has not been identified.

Inform Residents and Ratepayers and Communications regarding Municipal Activities

In the absence of someone taking responsibility for Marketing and Communication the responsibility fell to each of the “portfolio heads” and the chairman to bring developments to the attention of the community and to achieve this we used the various WhatsApp groups and to a lesser extent Face Book. Recently, at the request of community members, who felt

bombarded by less significant matters, the Bathurst Civic Affairs group was created, the intention being to focus only on current civic matters. We also pointed out that any reasonable request to share “civic” information would be posted and this continues to be the case.

There is much more we could do like mail drops, Instagram and Twitter posts but that would need to be a balance approach and should be carefully considered.

BR&RA Registration and Improved Presence

We initially intended to register the Bathurst Residents and Ratepayers Association (BR&RA) as a Non-Profit Organisation directly with the Department of Social Development but this turned out to be an exercise in futility and a huge waste of time. This resulted in us applying to CIPRA and our application was successfully registered.

At about the same time we attempted to register a bank account with one of the less expensive banks, this too was a waste of time. We ended up registering a banking account with FNB in Port Alfred.

Additionally, we have requested Ndlambe Municipality to recognise BR&RA as a bona fide association interested in community affairs. To this end Ms Cheree Dewey and Mr C Boyd serve on the Ward 5 Committee, chaired by Cllr Sweli (ANC).

Our community is represented by Mr Johnson and Mr Boyd on the Bathurst Community Police Forum. This forum used to meet regularly but went through a slump and has this week been revitalised but is a frustrating forum to work with, this frustration has translated in our Community Crime Prevention Form being less effective than it could possibly be.

Poor Road Surfaces, Pedestrian Paths and Pot Holes

The municipality does not budget according to conventional budgeting practices and simply applies a parameter increase in key areas such as road surfacing added to this is the poor practice of lumping all the roads maintenance allocation against one cost centre. The net effect of this is that proper planning and control of expenditure does not happen.

BR&RA have attempted to work with the responsible officials towards a situation where zero based budgeting and activity based cost methodologies are employed.

The grader assigned to this part of Ndlambe is often non operational and it does not operate according to acceptable practices. This has been brought to the attention of the Municipal Manager but we have not had a reply.

We have been somewhat fortunate in that the R67 resurfacing project improved the road surface and the potholes were removed. We had anticipated that the project would address the verges too but that did not materialise. We also hope that the barrier opposite the Pig will be repaired. We are pleased to note that the long awaited Speed Calming Measures have been installed but there really are too few. Attempts to increase the number, particularly between the Pig and The Workshop was unsuccessful. Whilst BR&RA also put pressure on the Roads Department it was Gavin’s dogged determination that probably has significant effect.

An analysis of the roads and the need of maintenance was conducted in consultation with the Deputy Director Infrastructure it was envisaged that this would translate into a budget and implementation plan, sadly this did not transpire.

Community Safety

Community Hall

When the Community Hall burnt down and the SAPS concluded that the fire was not caused by vandalism or arson and the Municipality has accepted this finding. This therefore brings into question the forensic investigators finding as it is believed that he determined that the fire was set intentionally! Attempts to receive a copy of the forensic investigators report have been unsuccessful. Additionally, the building was not used for its intended purpose and this exposed the municipality to further risk. The Ward Councillor was advised by BR&RA on how to probe the matter but a response is awaited. This matter should not be left in the current state.

The building housed certain artefacts including a map, flag, marble plaque and a brass plate that we believed had been lost during the fire but a chance discovery by an intrepid sleuth revealed that these were intact. The items were “liberated” are now in safe keeping at the Agricultural Museum.

Car Guards

The Car Guard situation has not been resolved adequately. Despite meeting with SAPS, business owners and Multi Security Services little progress has been made. In part this is because for BR&RA to hire the Car Guards would expose it to vicarious liability and as the Deputy Director Community Safety pointed out, only traffic control officers may direct traffic on a Provincial or National Road. Clearly there is no intent to solve this problem.

Cameras for Security and Block Watch

We had grand schemes to place cameras at strategic positions in and around Bathurst with a view to reduce crime. The construction company, Tau Pelle, were approached with a request to fund such an initiative but without success.

However, a very generous donation was made by a resident of Bathurst to fund several cameras, two of which are Licence Plate Recognition cameras located at the Shaw Park and St Francis road intersections. These cameras were installed but because they were not located in the most effective manner adjustments were requested and a demonstration given. To date the finalise invoice has not been presented for payment.

At least one area of Bathurst has incurred the cost of installing “Block Watch” signage and CCTV cameras, this, by all accounts, has been very effective. The more we take steps to ensure our safety the better as it is very apparent that the state institutions are battling to meet the growing need.

Failing Lower Courts, Prosecution and SAPS and other agencies

We had the very sad incident recently when, it is alleged, one of our residents murdered another resident. The circumstances leading up to this murder indicate that the systems needed to protect residents is dysfunctional and ultimately a murder was committed leaving traumatised families and a very upset community. Having attended the bail applications I can with assurance say that I found the various agencies lacking with the net result being that the alleged murderer is out on bail and is free to move about South Africa except he may not enter Bathurst. The case of murder cannot proceed in the High Court until the forensic results are available.

Commonage

The Commonage remains under threat from the poorly managed landfill site and the possibility of a sand/gravel mine opening in the same proximity. Also, it seems that Ndlambe intend to continue with plans to abstract water from the Lushington River at the site known as “Die Gat”. Many attempt have been made to engage in a meaningful way with the municipality and these have realised only limited success.

Recently Mr Rippon has been proposing that part of the Commonage is included in a conservancy and has attempted to engage the Mayor and the Municipal Manager but this has been unsuccessful. More recently he met with residents from Nolutkanyo but it seems that this engagement did not proceed well and on the back of that has abandoned plans of introducing his thoughts to the residents of Bathurst.

The Commonage is a vital resource to the people of Bathurst and a balanced and sustainable manner of effective utilisation must be found so that all residents can reap benefit.

The Provincial Departments of Water and as well Conservation have been approached but it seems that they are reluctant to respond formally about the management on the Commonage, it seems therefore that the way forward may require litigation.

Liquor Licence Application

The Ndlambe Municipality, in some haste, called a meeting in order to consult with the abutting neighbours the an Liquor Licence application had been received from a property on Kowie Road. BR&RA learnt about this just the day before and our concerns were raised at the meeting. Subsequently the application was tabled at the Ward 5 Committee meeting. The application was not supported on the basis that the municipality administration had not followed legislated guidelines as how these applications should be dealt with. BRRRA did not consider merits of this specific application. The Speaker was advised that by not following due process Ndlambe was prejudicing the applicants chance of success.

Lessons learnt

Constitution

The Constitution needs amendment in several place and the new Committee should consider a minor revision in a few places like to fees payable.

Structure of BR&RA

The BR&RA must reorganise itself to align more with the already existing interest groups and commercial bodies and in this way be more relevant, examples include BAS, Equestrian, Sport groups, Business, Historical Society, Artists Guild. This must of course also include interest groups from Nolutanyo.

There is much work to be done and the BR&RA members must be very active and driven to achieve goals with no remuneration.

Responsiveness

There are huge benefits to marketing Bathurst as a destination more effectively through all channels and we should be using modern integrated technology to achieve a greater reach but this will require an integrated approach and a willingness to

Bathurst has untapped potential, we have wonderful artists, a great climate, we are well positioned between East London, Gqeberha and other centres. Our hunting, fishing and wildlife safaris are unsurpassed and we should capitalise on these resources.

Nomination/Election of Office Bearers

The BR&RA constitution was drafted in a manner so as to preclude any political party gaining dominance and as such any party member would need to resign from holding office. As I have become a member of ActionSA I tendered my resignation at an earlier opportunity but my committee declined to accept it on that occasion, requesting that I remain in office until the AGM is held. It is at this point that my resignation comes into effect.

I wish my successors the best of luck and will continue to support our community as a member of the Ward 5 Committee and in any other role I can play.